

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) *Endgame*(B, 2661-2688)

Samuel Beckett was born near Dublin. He came from an Anglo-Irish Protestant family. Beckett received a B.A from Trinity College, Dublin, and after teaching English abroad, he returned to earn his M.A. in Dublin in 1931. In 1937, Beckett settled permanently in Paris, where he wrote in French, then translated his work into Irish-inflected English. He is best-known for his plays, especially *Waiting for Godot* (1948), and *Endgame* (1957). Beckett focuses his work on fundamental questions of existence and nonexistence, the mind and the body.

Endgame has, at the heart of it, a vexed relationship between master and servant. They bicker and clearly dislike each other; yet they stay together despite their claims to end it all --to leave, die, or simply depart. The overall sense of the play is tragicomic, and it fits well with an absurdist world, where existentialist ideas can be seen at every turn.

Question: What is the meaning of the title, Endgame?

The term, of course, is drawn from chess, and refers to the final moves of a match, when checkmate is being prepared by one of the two contestants. Who is checking whom in Beckett's play, or does the title simply refer to the dead end of existence, where the meaninglessness of everything makes itself clear? Is there in this play any ray of light that would open the staged events to a sliver of meaning? Nell and Nagg hold onto a furtive set of memories of their former joy together. Clov discusses the possibility that he and Hamm are becoming meaningful, then rapidly dismisses the possibility. Hamm indulges in a long tailor joke, and in rendering it serves us a small portion of (dirty) joie de vivre. Finally, if we are trying to consider any element of light in the play, we might remember that *Endgame* is a kind of absurdist vaudeville show, thus does not take itself dead seriously. Perhaps Beckett is also laughing at the exaggerated desolation of the scene he depicts?

Comparative Literature:

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